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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: ECONOMICS AND DEMOCRACY ARE
HIGHLIGHTED IN COMPAORE,S NEW YEAR,S SPEECH.

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In his traditional New Year's address, President Blaise Compaore focused on economics, including sustainable and balanced development, economic growth, the fight against corruption, and infrastructure development. He also reflected on broader aspects of democracy with an emphasis on education and health reforms, and broached the topic of institutional and political change. Compaore announced that as of January 2010, anti-retroviral treatment (ARV) for HIV positive patients would henceforth be free of charge. The president declared that, despite adversity, climactic or economic, Burkina Faso is progressing. END SUMMARY.

Focus on economics

¶2. (U) In his traditional New Year's address, President Blaise Compaore said that during the past year, Burkina Faso has focused on, and will continue to focus on, sustainable and balanced development. Host to the Seventh World Forum on Sustainable Development, Burkina Faso also took an active role during the Copenhagen Summit: "I hope that the nations of the world will ensure they bequeath a livable planet to future generations."

¶3. (U) He went on to say that throughout the past year, economic crises and meteorological changes impacted Burkina Faso negatively by affecting export revenues and decreasing investment opportunities. Despite the global economic downturn, Burkina Faso made notable economic progress in 2009 and has nurtured hope in the development of a mining industry. The economic environment has made it clear that there is a necessity to engage in multi-faceted development as a way to limit the impact of a sometimes fickle and unpredictable world economy, the president claimed. The G-20 summit and its quest for a sounder world economic order is a source of hope for less developed countries, according to Compaore, and Burkina Faso reaffirmed its belief that through regional economic integration (across the African continent) State economic vulnerabilities can be limited.

¶4. (U) In order to increase the efficiency of development strategies the president added, financial accountability of public spending needs to be further highlighted. The fight against corruption, in all spheres (political, economic and social) is indispensable: "It is imperative to continue the fight against corruption, but also encourage sound management practices of State resources. These practices will lead to a healthier business climate." President Compaore suggested that in order to provide better access to transportation for rural populations, infrastructural investments need to be made, notably to build roads, railroads and airports. In the coming year, a special emphasis will be placed on the construction of rural roads in order to strengthen the decentralization process. The network that interconnects Burkina Faso to the Ivorian electrical system will also be enlarged to provide better reliability and a wider distribution of energy.

Emphasis on democratic principles and basic social services

¶15. (U) The second part of Compaore's New Year's speech focused on democratic principles and prerequisites. He explained that basic social services, such as education and health would become priorities in 2010 and promised investments in those domains. He also reflected on the achievements of the past year, particularly those that demonstrated democratic progress such as official conferring of a the status of "leader of the opposition," passage of an electoral gender quota law (for legislative and municipal elections only), and the signing of a private media convention. Compaore offered that these are examples of how Burkina Faso wants to build a peaceful and just society: "Throughout the year, the people of Burkina Faso have demonstrated their willingness to anchor democracy firmly." Looking forward Compaore suggested that changes would be necessary to consolidate democracy and strengthen the institutions: "The strengthening of a democratic culture demands the elaboration and application of political and institutional reforms."

¶16. (U) Recognizing that human capital is the most precious resource to ensure durable development, Compaore explained that improvements to the education system would also be a priority in 2010. He promised that schools and universities will be built during the coming year, a special teacher status will be ratified and finally progress would be made to narrow the gender gap in education. In an announcement that made headlines in most newspapers, Compaore declared that ARV treatment for HIV positive patients would henceforth be free

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in Burkina Faso.

¶17. (U) Social peace in Burkina Faso is dependent on peace in Africa suggested Compaore, and Africa will be incapable of focusing on the numerous obstacles to development without that peace. Further elaborating, he recalled that during its UNSC presidency (December 2009), Burkina Faso had worked hard towards achieving this ongoing peace. "We must continue to work towards peace, we must work to restore dialogue among belligerent groups in order to achieve this peace."

¶18. (U) The New Year's address concluded by promising that 2010 would be the year during which "democracy will be firmly rooted in Burkina Faso, and during which freedoms will be expanded notably with the holding of Presidential elections." (Note: Elections are slated for November 2010. It is widely believed that Compaore, who has been in power since 1987, will easily win reelection. End Note.) Without omitting to mention the role of international donors and supporters, Compaore included them in his recognition and thanks: "I express my gratitude to the friends of Burkina Faso, development partners, and each member of the international community that constantly supports our quest for progress."

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT: While his roadmap for the coming year might appear a little ambitious, Compaore's speech contained a number of interesting points. Of note is the fact that for the third time in a month (December 11, December 30 and December 31st) he has mentioned the need for political and institutional reform. Certainly not far from the Compaore's mind was the fact that elections are just around the corner. Also, because the President has been criticized for spending so much time on international affairs and mediation of regional disputes, he probably felt the need to concentrate on domestic issues in the run-up to the elections and burnish his credentials on the home front.

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